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Thursday, May 17, 2018
 Ramadan 1, 1439 AH

GULF TIMES SPORT

TENNIS
Nadal and Djoko power on as Thiem crashes out in Rome
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FOOTBALL / AMIR CUP

Khalifa stadium ready for Qatar's biggest fixture

Al Duhail to face Al Rayyan in May 19 final

By Sports Reporter
 Doha

The Organising Committee of the Amir Cup have completed their preparations for the May 19 final, which will see Al Rayyan take on QNB Stars League and Qatar Cup champions Al Duhail. Tournament director Abdullah al-Saai, Captain Abdullah al-Ghanim of Lekhwiya, and Qatar Football Association's (QFA) Marketing and Communication director Khalid Mubarak al-Kuwari, gave the details at a press conference held on Monday at Khalifa International Stadium. Al-Saai informed that most of the arrange-



(From left) Qatar Football Association's Marketing and Communication director Khalid Mubarak al-Kuwari, Tournament Director Abdullah al-Saai and Captain Abdullah al-Ghanim of Lekhwiya gave out the details of preparations during a press conference. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

ments for the final have been completed, with only a few more details left to be ironed out, and the same will be completed in the coming days. He said Al Duhail and Al Rayyan will be training at the match venue the day before the final. He said the ticket sale was going well too.

For his part, al-Ghanim, head of the Internal Security Forces at Lekhwiya, said that there are special arrangements for the upcoming final. He pointed out that there is a comprehensive traffic plan to avoid congestion on the roads leading to the stadium. Al-Ghanim urged the crowd to come to the stadium well before the kick-off time to avoid missing out on the action. Al-Kuwari announced that an Iftar party will be held for the fans and organisers at the Qatar Women's Sports Hall. The gates will be opened in the direction of the stadium at 6:45pm. The activities will start off before the Iftar time. Al-Kuwari pointed out that the gate numbers 22-23-24-25-26 were allocated to the fans of Al Rayyan while gates 2-3-4-5-29 were allocated to the fans of Al Duhail. Gates 11-16 are for families and gate 12 for people with special needs. He also informed that eight luxury cars and 250 other valuable prizes will be distributed to the winners through a draw to be held at half time of the final, which will kick-off at 10:15pm.

QFA announces dates for league, local competitions

QNA
 Doha

Qatar Football Association (QFA) announced that the new season 2018-2019 will start on August 3 and will be preceded by Super Cup, which will be held between the winners of Qatar Cup and HH the Amir Cup on August 1. QFA also said that the second division season will kick off on September 19, while Qatargas U23 League will start on September 4. The start of the season comes early in order to give the Qatari national football team the opportunity to prepare for the next year's entitlements, which will start with Asian Championship from January 5 - February 1 in the UAE. Qatar will also participate in Copa America in Brazil in June 2019, first time that an Arab national team will participate in this tournament. The current season will conclude with HH the Amir Cup final between Al Duhail and Al Rayyan on Saturday evening at Khalifa International Stadium.



كأس الأمير
EMIR CUP
2018



Emir Cup Final



Al-Rayyan vs Al-Duhail
 Saturday, 19th of May
 10:15pm
 At Khalifa International Stadium
 Gates open at 7:15pm

#EmirCup كأس الأمير





SPOTLIGHT

Alexander-Arnold gets World Cup call as Hart, Wilshere axed

Selection of Alexander-Arnold comes after some fine performances in Liverpool's run to the Champions League final

AFP
London

Trent Alexander-Arnold has been included in England's squad for the World Cup as Joe Hart and Jack Wilshere were the big-name casualties of Gareth Southgate's youth revolution. The England manager confirmed yesterday that, as widely anticipated, he had omitted both on-loan West Ham goalkeeper Hart and Arsenal midfielder Wilshere were not in his squad for the World Cup in Russia.

Hart is 31 and has played 75 times for England. Injury-prone Wilshere is 26 and has 34 England caps. But 19-year-old Liverpool right-back Alexander-Arnold will be on the flight to Russia as Southgate has opted for a youthful selection in what he hopes will prove a bold new era for the under-achieving national team.

"With Joe, we've got three other goalkeepers who have had very good seasons and the decision I was faced with was do I keep Joe in and have experience around the group. Or give the three guys who have basically had a better season a chance?" Southgate said. The 23 players averages just 19 caps, making them England's least experienced World Cup squad since 1962. The selection of Alexander-Arnold, comes after some fine performances in Liverpool's run to the Champions League final.

"The first call up for Trent Alexander-Arnold is well deserved. When we pick young players, it's not just because they are young, it's because their performances deserve it," Southgate said.

Southgate named Burnley's Nick Pope, at 26 the oldest of the three goalkeepers, in place of Hart and called up Manchester City's Fabian Delph, who can play at left-back or in midfield, to take over from Wilshere. Delph hasn't played for England since 2015, but he is coming off a Premier League title-winning campaign with City.

Based on the players' age on the first match-day of the tournament, England have named their third youngest World Cup squad behind the 2006 and 1958 editions. The most capped player, with 52 appearances, is Chelsea defender Gary Cahill, at 32 the second oldest member of the squad, who was included despite missing out in recent friendlies, while there was no place for Liverpool midfielder Adam Lallana, who has recently returned from a long hamstring injury lay-off.

Chelsea's young midfielder Ruben Loftus-Cheek has earned selection after an impressive season on loan at Crystal Palace. "I believe this is a squad which we can be excited about," Southgate said. "It is a young group, but with some really important senior players so I feel the balance of the squad is good, both in terms of its experience, its character and also the positional balance."

Southgate has included just four players — Jordan Henderson, Raheem Sterling, Danny Welbeck and Cahill — who played in the last World Cup in 2014. Harry Kane, Jamie Vardy, Marcus Rashford, Sterling and Welbeck are England's attacking options.

Nobody in the squad has won a World Cup match, but Southgate is confident England can make an impact as they dream of winning the tournament for the first time since 1966. "We have a lot

of energy and athleticism in the team, but players that are equally comfortable in possession of the ball and I think people can see the style of play we've been looking to develop," he said. "The selection process has been over months really, it's not just been the last few weeks. We feel the team are improving and we want to continue that momentum."

England face Panama, Tunisia and Belgium in their World Cup group stage matches. Southgate does not have to formally submit his squad list to FIFA until June 4. He has put Lallana, Burnley duo Tom Heaton and James Tarkowski, Lewis Cook of Bournemouth and West Bromwich Albion's Jake Livermore on a stand-by list in case of injuries. The squad are due to begin training together next week ahead of friendlies against Nigeria at Wembley on June 2 and Costa Rica in Leeds on June 7.

ENGLAND'S 23-MAN SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Jack Butland (Stoke), Jordan Pickford (Everton), Nick Pope (Burnley)

Defenders: Kyle Walker (Manchester City), John Stones (Manchester City), Harry Maguire (Leicester), Kieran Trippier (Tottenham Hotspur), Danny Rose (Tottenham Hotspur), Ashley Young (Manchester United), Phil Jones (Manchester United), Gary Cahill (Chelsea), Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool)

Midfielders: Eric Dier (Tottenham Hotspur), Dele Alli (Tottenham Hotspur), Jesse Lingard (Manchester United), Jordan Henderson (Liverpool), Ruben Loftus-Cheek (Crystal Palace), Fabian Delph (Manchester City)

Forwards: Jamie Vardy (Leicester), Marcus Rashford (Manchester United), Raheem Sterling (Manchester City), Harry Kane (Tottenham Hotspur), Danny Welbeck (Arsenal)



Liverpool defender Trent Alexander-Arnold. (Reuters)

ANXIOUS

With World Cup looming, Neymar admits: 'nobody is as scared as me'

AFP
Sao Paulo

As Neymar, the world's most expensive player, battles to be fit for Brazil's World Cup campaign, he is aware of the pressure. "Nobody is as scared as me," he said on Tuesday. The Paris Saint-Germain striker has not played since February, but knows that football-mad Brazil hopes he is fit to lead their team to glory in the World Cup.

"I know that people are a little anxious, but nobody more than me, nobody is as nervous about my comeback and nobody is more scared than me," Neymar told Brazilian station TV Globo. The world's most expensive player was injured on February 25 playing for PSG against Marseille in the French league.

The 26-year-old striker underwent surgery on a bone in his right foot in Brazil at the start of Match and has since dedicated himself to preparing for the World Cup.

"It's a very difficult time, right? I think it's one of the most difficult I've ever had, because I'm very close to a dream I have, which is the World Cup," said Neymar, who broke a bone in his neck in the quarter-finals of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and missed the semi-final, which the hosts lost, 7-1, to Germany.

"Thank God I have this further opportunity, this further chance, to try to be a world champion for my country, which is a dream that I have had since childhood," Neymar



Paris Saint-Germain's Neymar attends a training session in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

said. "It is my goal. I hope it is my cup."

Neymar was on Tuesday included in the 23-man provisional Brazilian squad for the World Cup which starts in Russia on June 14. Brazil are aiming to add a sixth star on their shirts. Neymar resumed training with PSG last Sunday. If he is to gain match practice

before the World Cup his chances will come in warm-up games against Croatia in Liverpool on June 3 and against Austria in Vienna three days later.

Brazil kick off their World Cup against Switzerland in Rostov on June 17. Their group also includes Costa Rica and Serbia.

FOCUS

Arteta is strong favourite to replace Wenger at Arsenal

By David Hytner
The Guardian

Mikel Arteta is the strong favourite to succeed Arsène Wenger as manager at Arsenal, with productive talks having progressed between his camp and the club.

Conversations are so advanced that Arteta is giving thought to the people he might want in his backroom team. It is unclear whether Steve Bould would stay, with Wenger's assistant not always seeing eye to eye with Arteta when they were together at Arsenal.

The club have considered the merits of a number of managers, including Max Allegri, but the current Juventus manager wants greater control over budgets and recruitment for the next cycle of his career. Those demands do not match the Arsenal chief executive Ivan Gazidis's vision for the job and Allegri is understood to be leaning towards staying in Turin.

Arteta would be happy to take a job more akin to that of a head coach. That would not compromise the structure put in place by Gazidis. Last November the



Mikel Arteta, currently a coach at Manchester City, has emerged as the clear favourite to replace Arsene Wenger. (Reuters)

club appointed Dortmund's Sven Mislintat and Barcelona's Raul Sanllehi as head of recruitment and football relations respectively.

Arteta, a former Arsenal captain who played for the club from 2011 to 2016, has been working as a coach at Manchester City under Pep Guardiola since July 2016. City's manager has said he

would not stand in Arteta's way if Arsenal come calling.

"If he decides to move because he has this offer, this option, I will not say you don't have to go," Guardiola said. "I want the best for my friends and he's a friend of mine. If he decides to go, I will be so sad but I will understand his decision, because it's his career, his life, his family."

BOTTOMLINE

Messi targets World Cup success with Argentina

Reuters
Buenos Aires

Lionel Messi, the five-times World Player of the Year, said he was looking forward to the World Cup in Russia and was targeting at least a semi-final place with Argentina. Beaten finalists four years ago in Brazil, Argentina have not won a major international title since 1993 when they lifted the Copa America. They reached the final of the same tournament in 2015 and 2016 but lost both times and Messi said the successive failures weighed heavily. "It's a weight that we carry and we want to overcome it," he said.

Argentina kick off their World Cup campaign against Iceland on June 16 and then face Nigeria and Croatia. They have struggled under coach



Jorge Sampaoli, who took over last year and has won just five of his 10 games in charge. Argentina beat Italy 2-0 in a March friendly but that victory was sandwiched by a 4-2 loss to Nigeria and a 6-1 hammering by Spain. Spain are one of the favourites for the tournament, Messi said, along with Brazil, Germany and France.

Sporting Lisbon in shock after horrific gang attack

Lisbon: A shocked Sporting Lisbon will play in Sunday's Portuguese Cup final despite a horrific ordeal that saw a 50-strong gang of masked and hooded men brutally attack players and officials at training.

Wearing t-shirts bearing the club's emblem the mob invaded Sporting's training ground on Tuesday and went on the rampage, terrorising players and personnel and vandalising dressing rooms. Dutch international Bas Dost, Sporting's top scorer this season, required stitches to his neck. A photograph of his bloodied face appeared on social media. "It was a distressing situation and we are all shocked," the striker, with 27 league goals to his name this season, told Dutch news website *Algemeen Dagblad*. "This is a drama for everyone. I am empty," the 28-year-old added to Portuguese website *Ojogo*.

He had scored in Sunday's 2-1 loss to Maritimo Funchal which left Sporting in third and missing out on Champions League football next season. Argentina international Marcos Acuna and Croatia's Josip Misic were also

assaulted in the raid on Sporting's Alcochete training base in the Lisbon suburbs.

The team met their player's union yesterday to discuss how to react and whether to pull out of Sunday's Cup final against Desportivo das Aves. A team statement later confirmed that despite their frightening ordeal they would face Desportivo in four days time.

"We are not in a physical or psychological condition to resume normal training immediately," the players said. "But because the Cup final is a celebration of Portuguese football, and also out of respect to our club, we will play in the final."

The horrific incident left Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa "worried by the image this projects of Portugal to the world". He added: "I'm concerned as Portugal is a power in professional football, and I'm worried about the seriousness of what's happened."

Portuguese police have made 21 arrests, according to the government. Several

hundred Sporting fans made their way to the team's Alvalde stadium on Tuesday night to lend their support to their stricken team's players and management.

Supporters group 'Juventude Leonina' condemned the attack on social media. "The Juventude Leonina numbers more than 7,000 fans. It deeply regrets what happened and disassociates itself from these events."

Sporting issued a statement of their own, decrying what it termed "acts of vandalism and the attacks on (our) athletes, coaches and professional staff."

The Portuguese Primeira Liga said: "The perpetrators of these incidents are not fans of football, they are criminals." Tuesday's drama follows last month's war of words between players and the club's president who had threatened to suspend almost all of the "spoilt brats" in the first team.

Bruno de Carvalho launched a rant on social media following Sporting's 2-0 Europa League quarter-final first leg loss to Atletico Madrid.

SPOTLIGHT

Stakes raised for Mourinho-Conte feud in Cup final

The root of their feud comes from Conte's success in his first campaign at Chelsea, just a season after Mourinho was sacked in December 2015 in his second spell

AFP
London

Jose Mourinho and Antonio Conte renew hostilities with the stakes heightened when Manchester United and Chelsea face off in Saturday's FA Cup final needing silverware to mask this season's flaws. Conte's need is the greater.

Having missed out on Champions League football for next season, many expect the Wembley showpiece to be the Italian's final match in charge at Stamford Bridge, regardless of the outcome. If it is, nothing will give Conte more joy than bowing out by winning a cup competition for the first time as a coach by beating the man with whom he has clashed most regularly and bitterly since arriving in England.

Conte labelled Mourinho a "little man" and "fake" at the peak of their spat in December. Days earlier, Mourinho had appeared to allude to a suspension given to Conte for allegedly failing to report match-fixing when coaching at Siena. Conte later won an appeal, clearing him of any wrongdoing in the case.

The root of their feud comes from Conte's success in his first campaign at Chelsea, just a season after Mourinho's second spell at Stamford Bridge ended in the Portuguese being sacked having won just four of Chelsea's first 16 league games, in December 2015.

On his first return as a visiting manager, Mourinho protested at what he perceived as Conte's humiliating celebrations in a 4-0 victory for the Blues over United. Conte then warned his players at the start of this season not to let their standards slip to the levels of "the last season with Mourinho".

In hindsight, the Italian was right to warn against complacency as Chelsea have fallen well short of the form they showed in storming to the title last season. A fifth-placed finish in the Premier League was confirmed when they capitulated 3-0 to Newcastle on the final day of the season on Sunday.

"To finish fifth is a big disappointment. How damaging is it not to be in the Champions League? You'll have to ask the club about that," Conte said, only intensifying speculation about his future. "If we play like this in the FA Cup final, we don't have a chance. We have six days to



Chelsea's Italian head coach Antonio Conte (left) and Manchester United's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho. (AFP)

change our approach, our desire, our will to fight because we can do much better?"

Mourinho has at least ensured Champions League qualification for next season via a second-place finish in the Premier League.

However, a record 19-point gap to champions Manchester City and a deeply disappointing Champions League last-16 exit to Sevilla means the Portuguese is also left hanging on until the final game of the season to deliver a trophy that would silence some of the critics of United's often turgid performances, lacking in the invention and flair displayed by rivals City and Champions League finalists Liverpool.

"Because I almost do that all the time (win a trophy), when I don't do it, you (the media) kill me," said Mourinho on the prospect of going without a trophy in his second season at Old Trafford. "Which is what you are all ready to do."

To do so, Mourinho must shake United out of their own end-of-season slumber — the Red Devils have scored just once in

their past three games. Whether Mourinho can close the gap on City next season will depend on his ability to finally get the best out of his attacking talent, particularly marquee signings Paul Pogba and Alexis Sanchez.

Starting that process with a trophy on Saturday would be a strong statement of intent from United, and give Mourinho the extra satisfaction of showing Conte how short-lived life as Chelsea manager under ruthless Russian owner Roman Abramovich can be.

FOCUS

Hazard warns Chelsea to improve squad before he decides future

AFP
London

Eden Hazard has warned Chelsea to sign players who will turn them into title contenders if they want him to commit his future to the club.

Hazard has two years left on his present contract and is considering whether to sign a lucrative extension that would keep him at Stamford Bridge for the remaining prime years of his career. But the Belgium playmaker is frustrated by Chelsea's failure to qualify for next season's Champions League and is reportedly a close-season target for Real Madrid and Paris Saint Germain.

Asked what it would take to stay with Chelsea in the long-term, Hazard said: "I'm waiting for new players next season. We will see. I want good players because I want to win next season the Premier League. I want to win a lot of things."

This would be Hazard's last big contract and the midfielder has no intention of rushing his decision, despite reports that Chelsea are willing to pay him around £300,000 (\$404,000, 343,000 euros) per week. "That's why I'm taking my time. It's something big. I need to think of a lot of things. One thing for sure is I'm happy here," he said.

Chelsea finished fifth in the Premier League, well adrift of champions Manchester City, after an inconsistent season marred their defence of the title. They also failed to win the Champions League and League Cup, leaving Saturday's FA Cup final against Manchester United as their last chance of silverware this season.

Hazard concedes Chelsea have under-performed, but he believes winning the Wembley showdown with United would at least salvage something from their disappointing season. "To play Champions League next season is important. To win tro-

phies also. We want to do it," Hazard said.

"We want to play Champions League next season and win trophies. That's it. So if we can't have one, we need the other. We can't be in the Champions League next season so we need to win trophies. That's it."

"I say many times before I think it is not my last game. It's the last game of the season, that's it. After the World Cup then we will be ready for the next season. But for me, in my mind, I'm here, I have one week to play now. Saturday is a massive game. I just want to win for me and them also."

Hazard insists the uncertainty surrounding Chelsea manager Antonio Conte has had no impact on the squad. Conte is expected to leave at the end of the season after his feud with the club's hierarchy over their failure to back his transfer plans. "We don't think about that. We're just focused on the game," Hazard said. "We have one game to play and then we'll see what happens at the end of the season."

If Chelsea can lift the FA Cup, then the Champions League will be the one major honour to elude Hazard during his time at Stamford Bridge. "I need two more trophies, Champions League and FA Cup. That's it," Hazard said.

"We're Chelsea. We need trophies at the end of the season. At the moment we have nothing. We have not qualified for the Champions League. So the season has been bad. If we can't be in the Champions League we need the trophy. It's up to us to save the season with the FA Cup. I've never won the FA Cup. I hope this year is for me and for Chelsea. We will give everything."

Chelsea face a familiar foe this weekend in United manager Jose Mourinho, who had two spells as Blues boss. Mourinho has been criticised for conservative tactics this season, but Hazard expects United to pose a stern test. "We know how he will play. We all know that. That's why we need to be ready," he said.



Eden Hazard has two years left on his present contract, but the Belgium playmaker is reportedly a close-season target for Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain.

BUNDESLIGA

RB Leipzig part ways with Hasenhuettl

AFP
Berlin

Bundesliga side RB Leipzig confirmed yesterday that they have parted company with coach Ralph Hasenhuettl, whose contract was terminated by mutual consent. Hasenhuettl had a contract until June 2019.

The 50-year-old Austrian took charge of Leipzig for 2016/17, steering them to second place in the Bundesliga in a stunning first season in Germany's top flight to qualify for the Champions League.

However, they came only third in their group and Leipzig, who are backed by energy drinks giants Red Bull, finished sixth in

the 2017/18 Bundesliga after reaching the quarter-finals of the Europa League.

Following their remarkable first year in the Bundesliga, finishing second only to Bayern Munich after unearthing stars like Germany striker Timo Werner and Liverpool-bound Naby Keita, the team struggled for consistency this season.

Hasenhuettl signed off in style with a 6-2 away win at Hertha Berlin on Saturday when England junior international Ademola Lookman scored and set up two more goals in a superb team display.

Leipzig's director of sport Ralf Rangnick wanted to keep working with Hasenhuettl for one more campaign and the hunt is now on to find his successor.

Moyes leaves West Ham, Allardyce sacked by Everton

London: David Moyes has left West Ham following the end of his short-term contract, the Premier League club announced yesterday. The 55-year-old former Everton and Manchester United boss arrived at the London Stadium in November, with the sole objective of ensuring the Hammers' top-flight status, which he achieved.

"I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to David Moyes and his staff for achieving the target of keeping West Ham United in the Premier League," said joint chairman David Sullivan.

"When David and his team arrived, it was the wish of both parties that the focus be only on the six months until the end of the season, at which point a decision would be made with regards to the future," he added. "Having taken stock of the situation and reflected now the campaign is complete, we feel that it is right to move in a different direction."

Sullivan said the club, who finished 13th in the Premier League, aim to appoint a "high-calibre" successor within the next 10 days. The announcement on Moyes came barely 12 hours after David Gold, West Ham's co-owner, said he hoped Moyes would remain in charge for next season.

Reports this week said West Ham had held "productive" talks with Paulo Fonseca, the manager of Shakhtar Donetsk, while Sullivan remains a long-term admirer of Newcastle's Rafael Benitez. Former Manchester City boss Manuel Pellegrini, currently with Hebei China Fortune, and outgoing Paris St-Germain coach Unai Emery have also been linked with the role.

Moyes succeeded Slaven Bilic in November, when West Ham were in the relegation zone, and guided the team to safety. Speaking after West Ham's recent draw against Manchester United, he said



David Moyes succeeded Slaven Bilic in November, when West Ham were in the relegation zone. (Reuters)

staying in the Premier League was a "big achievement".

"We had to get the players in order a little bit after we came in, and we have done that," he said. "This is a big club and there are big expectations from the supporters so they will need to improve."

Moyes managed Everton for 11 years from 2002 before leaving the club to replace Alex Ferguson at United but was dismissed after just 10 months in charge. He also had a disappointing stint in Spain with Real Sociedad.

West Ham's statement came just hours after Everton announced the sacking of Sam Allardyce.

Allardyce was just six months in charge and guided the Premier League club away from relegation danger to a mid-table finish. The former England manager, 63, was brought in as Ronald

Koeman's replacement in November, but his rudimentary style of play has proved deeply unpopular with fans of the Merseyside club.

"We have made the decision that, as part of our longer-term plan, we will be appointing a new manager this summer," said new chief executive Denise Barrett-Baxendale. "On behalf of the chairman, board of directors and Mr Moshiri, I'd like to thank Sam for the job he has done at Everton. Sam was brought in at a challenging time last season to provide us with some stability and we are grateful to him for doing that," she added.

Former Watford and Hull City manager Marco Silva is the favourite to take over and could complete the move to Goodison Park six months after the club failed to prise him away from Vicarage Road. Despite signing an 18-month deal,

Allardyce appeared resigned to his fate after Sunday's 3-1 defeat at former club West Ham, during which Everton supporters called for his sacking.

"I can't quite say confident after all the rumours I'm reading in the paper," said Allardyce, when questioned about his future. "Generally there's no smoke without fire. We'll wait and see when we meet up."

Allardyce last month dismissed a survey sent to supporters asking them to grade his performance out of 10 as a mistake on the part of the club's marketing director, who he said does not "understand" how football works. As part of the questionnaire, supporters were asked whether they agree with the statement: "I have a high level of trust in the current manager and coaching staff at Everton e.g. in making the right decisions to get the best out of the team."

Allardyce, whose previous clubs include Bolton, Newcastle, Sunderland and Crystal Palace, landed his dream job with England in 2016 but that turned sour after only one match, with Allardyce stepping down following a newspaper sting.

Everton were unwilling to pay a reported compensation fee of £15mn (\$20mn) wanted by Watford for Silva when Koeman was sacked. However, Silva himself was then dismissed by Watford in January with the Hornets citing disruption caused by Everton's "unwarranted approach" for a major dip in form.

A change in manager could also affect Wayne Rooney's future at the club. England's all-time top scorer had reportedly agreed terms on a £12.5mn move to DC United in Major League Soccer last week. Rooney had seen his involvement limited under Allardyce, but could be convinced to stay at his boyhood club by a new regime.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Hulk hits double but Shanghai 'dream' over

'I feel full of pity because we had the dream of the Asian title, but now it is over'

AFP
Shanghai

Brazilian striker Hulk returned from injury to score twice for Shanghai SIPG but the Chinese side were dumped out of the Asian Champions League 4-3 on aggregate by Kashima Antlers yesterday. The Japanese became the last side to seal a spot in the quarter-finals, yet they did it the hard way, losing 2-1 on a sweltering and nervy night in Shanghai.

Vitor Pereira's Shanghai join Chinese Super League (CSL) champions Guangzhou Evergrande in tumbling out of the competition at the last-16 stage. Hulk, the 55.8 million-euro (\$66mm) forward who missed the 3-1 first-leg defeat in Japan, returned to captain the hosts and needed just seven minutes to make his mark.

Shoma Doi levelled for Kashima before Hulk scored a penalty with nine minutes left to set up a dramatic finale. But Shanghai were unable to find the goal to force extra time and Hulk said: "I feel full of pity because we had the dream of the Asian title, but now it is over. This is football, we fought to the end and now is the time to keep our heads up and focus on Sunday (against Jiangsu Suning in the CSL) and find three points."

The striker put his side on the way when he spun sharply in the box to fire into the net, sliding on his knees and pumping his fists in celebration. Last year's semi-finalists had more of the ball but Kashima were a threat on the break and Mu Kanazaki might have equalised with their first chance, on 19 minutes, but his header flashed wide.

Shanghai, who top the CSL on goal difference but have stumbled of late under their Portuguese coach, did not heed the warning. And Kashima made them pay three minutes before half-time when Doi adroitly steered the ball in to silence the home crowd.

Shanghai, for whom 60-million-euro Brazilian Oscar was largely anonymous until late on, went for broke in the second half. Visiting goalkeeper Kwoun Sun-tae stood firm until Kashima conceded a penalty with 10 minutes left and Hulk just about beat Kwoun from the spot to set up a grandstand finish.



Shanghai SIPG's Hulk (centre) vies for the ball with Kashima Antlers' Leo Silva (right) and Ueda Naomichi during the AFC Champions League round of 16 match. (AFP)

At one point in the second half, the benches of the two sides clashed, with players from both teams getting involved on the touchline. Pereira played down the fracas, saying: "A football match is different from opera, in which we are quiet. Football is emotional and we want to win."

Kashima coach Go Oiwa insisted that he was never worried, even as Hulk and his teammates pushed for a third goal. "I knew by looking at the players' eyes and faces that they were very strong mentally and we knew we could defend through the last 10 minutes. I was very confident they would do the job," he said.

Suwon Samsung Bluewings meanwhile beat fellow South Koreans Ulsan Hyundai 3-0 at home to progress 3-1 on aggregate. The quarter-finals take place in August and September.

away defeat. After finishing 16th in the table for the second year running, Wolfsburg, the 2015 German Cup winners and 2009 Bundesliga champions, must again win a play-off to stay in Germany's top flight. In financial terms, the clubs are poles apart.

Wolfsburg's budget for their squad is reportedly 60mn euros (\$70.8mn) – ten times that of Kiel, who are in the play-off after finishing third in the second division. "In Wolfsburg, a single player earns as much as our entire time, but we want to go up," said Holstein's sports boss Ralf Becker. The pressure is on Wolfsburg, who have had three coaches this season. "It (the play-off) is bigger than a cup game, at the end we can still go down and we can't afford to be arrogant," said Guilavogui.

Relegation would be a nightmare for Volkswagen-backed Wolfsburg, but promotion would also present Kiel with a headache. Their Holstein Stadium holds only 11,000, short of the minimum allowed capacity of 15,000 under Bundesliga regulations and according to reports, Kiel have approached Hannover 96 about a possible ground share.

ENGLISH CHAMPIONSHIP

Aston Villa reach playoff final with Boro stalemate

AFP
London

Aston Villa paid tribute to former defender J-Lloyd Samuel, who died in a car crash at just 37 on Tuesday night, as a 0-0 draw with Middlesbrough at Villa Park booked their place in the Championship playoff final.

Mile Jedinak's header in a 1-0 first leg win for the visitors at the Riverside on Saturday proved enough as Middlesbrough failed to threaten until Stewart Downing's free-kick hit the bar late on.

Villa will face Fulham at Wembley on May 26 in what is often dubbed the richest game in world football due to the Premier League TV riches at stake.

"We just shaded it over the two games, with a goal from a set-piece, but in the second half tonight there was only one team that was going to win it," said Villa manager Steve Bruce. "It was agony towards the end, if I'm being honest. It means so much."

Despite the celebrations as Bruce's side moved to within one match of bouncing back to the top flight, there was a sombre mood before kick-off with a minute's applause for Samuel. Cheshire police confirmed earlier in the day that the former Trinidad and Tobago international had been killed when his Range Rover collided with a van early on Tuesday morning.

Samuel spent the majority of his career at Villa before moving on to Bolton and loan spells at Gillingham and Cardiff before ending his playing career in Iran. Despite their late escape, Villa were well worthy of their place in the final as Boro keeper Daniel Randolph kept the visitors in the tie for long spells.

Bruce is now just one game away from a fifth promotion as manager to the Premier League,



Middlesbrough's Ben Gibson (right) clashes with Aston Villa's Robert Snodgrass during the Championship playoff second leg semi-final at Villa Park, Birmingham, on Tuesday night. (Reuters)

having also taken Birmingham and Hull up via the playoffs. "The game plan was superb so the manager deserves a lot of credit for that," said Villa captain John Terry. "There's a great team spirit among the boys. One more step and it'll be the dream."

Villa centre-back James Chester wasted the best chance of the first period when he hooked his shot wide from close range. Randolph then came to the fore as he made two fine saves from Lewis Grabban before getting fingertips to a long-range effort from Jack Grealish.

Middlesbrough hadn't even produced a shot on target until a controversial moment three minutes from time. Villa keeper Sam Johnstone was only booked for making a save outside the box from Adama Traore's attempted chip.

Downing then curled the resulting free-kick off the bar and Villa held out for six minutes of stoppage time to secure their trip to Wembley in 11 days' time.

SPOTLIGHT

Holstein who? Origi blunder leaves Wolfsburg red-faced

AFP
Berlin

VfL Wolfsburg were left red-faced before today's Bundesliga relegation play-off, first-leg, at home to Holstein Kiel after their striker Divock Origi admitted never having heard of the second division minnows.

The Belgian international, 23, who has scored six goals this season on loan from Liverpool, blundered at the weekend on German national television by confessing he knew nothing about Wolfsburg's play-off opponents. "You have to concede that to a foreign player. I can assure you: he now knows who Holstein Kiel is, but it's not ideal – that's clear," admitted Wolfsburg's coach Bruno Labbadia. In Origi's defence, most German football fans would struggle to name a single Holstein Kiel player before the David versus Goliath clash at Wolfsburg's sold-out stadium with the decisive second leg in Kiel next Monday.

Likewise, Wolfsburg's French midfielder Josuha Guilavogui was reportedly not previously aware that Kiel striker Marvin



Ducksch was the second division's top-scorer with 18 goals this season. "This shows what different worlds are meeting," said Holstein captain Rafael Czichos. "Here are players, who play at World Cups or come from Liverpool, playing against us, who know football from a slightly different side."

Holstein are on the verge of two promotions in as many seasons after coming up from the third division in 2016/17, while Wolfsburg have fallen from grace. Just two seasons ago, when Kiel were fighting to stay in the second division, Wolfsburg pulled off a stunning 2-0 home win against Cristiano Ronaldo's Real Madrid in the Champions League quarter-finals, but bowed out after a 3-0

FOCUS

UEFA council criticises Infantino's plans

Reuters
Lyon

AUEFA council featuring representatives of players, leagues and clubs from across Europe complained yesterday that world football body FIFA had gone over their heads in drawing up proposals for two ambitious new global competitions. The Professional Football Strategy Council (PFC) said it had "serious reservations" about the whole process and criticised "the hasty timing and lack of concrete information" from the sport's governing organisation. FIFA has proposed creating a 24-team Club World Cup tournament to be staged every four years as well as a Global Nations League which would culminate in an eight-team tournament – effectively a mini-World Cup – every two years.

According to a FIFA report, the two tournaments, backed by a consortium of private investors, are expected to generate at least \$25bn over a 12-year cycle. FIFA president Gianni Infantino has been trying to rush through the proposals in the already hectic period leading up to this year's World Cup

in Russia. Following a meeting in Lyon, the PFSC said its members had not been properly consulted and added in a statement that it "unanimously expressed serious reservations about the process surrounding the FIFA Club World Cup and Global Nations League proposals." It criticised the hasty timing and lack of concrete information and underlined the need for a clearly defined procedure.

FIFA has already met individual clubs to discuss the proposals and Real Madrid has said its supports the plans. The tournaments could be approved at a FIFA Council meeting in Moscow in June.

Ray Wilson, member of England's 1966 World Cup winning side, dies

London: Ray Wilson, a member of the England team that beat West Germany in the 1966 World Cup final, has died aged 83, former club Everton announced. An outstanding left-back, Wilson won 63 caps with 1966 a memorable year for him as he won the FA Cup with Everton at Wembley and a few weeks later the World Cup as hosts England beat West Germany 4-2 at the same stadium.

Wilson had been diagnosed with Alzheimers in 2004. "Everton Football Club is deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Ray Wilson," read a statement on the club website. "Unquestionably one of the finest footballers to wear the royal blue jersey, Ray passed away on Tuesday evening, aged 83."

Wilson, named Ramon after pre-World War II film star Ramon Navarro and married for 61 years to Pat, who survives him, and the father of two boys, Russell and Neil, never lost his love for Everton whom he joined in 1964.

"He loved it at Goodison, absolutely loved it," Pat said last year. "He still does. If they are on television, that is it. He sits there and watches it, transfixed."

Wilson was revered by both Everton and his first club Huddersfield and he was honoured in April this year when their Premier League clash was officially designated Ray Wilson Day.

Wilson played almost 300 matches for Huddersfield having been signed aged 17-year-old when he was working on the railways – it was thanks to Bill Shankly that he made the move to left-back from left-half in the 1956/57 campaign.

He moved to Merseyside in 1964. Huddersfield paid a fulsome tribute to him on their website. "Huddersfield Town is devastated to learn of the passing of World Cup winner Ramon 'Ray' Wilson. Ray is arguably the most successful and best-known player ever to pull on a Huddersfield Town shirt, having been a key member of England's World Cup-winning team in 1966.

"He made 283 appearances for the Club between 1952 and 1964, scoring six goals, and is still Town's most capped England player ever, representing his country 30 times as a Huddersfield player."

Joe Royle said Wilson was a "maestro" and had taught him a lot as he was beginning his career with Everton. "Ray led the onset of a new breed of full-backs," Royle told the Everton website.

"Prior to Ray, they had all been sentinels, big, tall lads. Maybe third centre-backs, rather than full-backs. He is a World Cup winner and played in the last England team that had four, maybe five, world class players," Royle said. "He was certainly one of those. He was the best of his kind at the time."

Even before he had a trial with the Yorkshire club, Everton had their eyes on him.

"I got a letter from Everton offering me a deal but I felt loyal to Huddersfield," he said years later. "But I remember looking around Goodison properly for the first time after I had joined and thought to myself, 'My word, what have I been missing out on all these years, I should have been here years ago.'"

NBA

Celtics survive James' attack to take 2-0 series lead

'It's Celtics basketball. We're really embracing Celtics basketball. We're playing hard'



LeBron James (right) of the Cleveland Cavaliers battles for the ball against Jaylen Brown of the Boston Celtics in the first-half during game two of the 2018 NBA Eastern Conference Finals at TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. (Getty Images/AFP)

Reuters
Boston

Jaylen Brown totalled 23 points and seven rebounds to help the Boston Celtics take a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference finals with a 107-94 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers on Tuesday night.

Terry Rozier scored 18 points, Al Horford added 15 points and 10 boards, Marcus Morris had 12 points and both Jayson Tatum and Marcus Smart contributed 11 for the Celtics, who were 108-83 winners Sunday in Game 1.

LeBron James recorded 42 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds for the Cavaliers, marking his NBA-record 17th career playoff game with 30 points and 10 assists. Kevin Love added 22

points and 15 rebounds, but Kyle Korver (11 points) was the only other Cleveland player to score in double figures. James, who managed just 15 points in the Game 1 loss, has won five consecutive East playoff series after losing the series opener.

Boston, which improved to 9-0 at home this postseason, has never lost a best-of-seven playoff series when leading 2-0.

"We just play hard," Horford said. "We go out there, we compete. It's Celtics basketball. We're really embracing Celtics basketball. We're playing hard."

"We've got each other's backs, and that's it."

Game 3 is Saturday night in Cleveland. "We have an opportunity to go back home, protect home court," James said. "We're going to use these days to really dive in on what needs to be done

to help our ballclub be successful. They did what they had to do, and that was protect home, and now it's our time to try to do that as well."

Smart's 3-pointer with 4:34 left in the third quarter gave the Celtics a 72-71 lead after they had trailed by 11. It was their first lead since they were up 3-2 only 49 seconds in. Boston was on top 84-77 entering the fourth quarter. Greg Monroe's cutting layup with 11:14 remaining put Boston up by 11. Neither team scored again until James' reverse layup with 9:08 on the clock.

Tensions boiled over when Cleveland's JR Smith shoved Horford on a drive to the basket. Smart and Smith exchanged shoves and had to be separated, with each player being whistled for a technical foul.

Horford's jump shot with

2:54 remaining pushed the Celtics' advantage to 103-89. After a James layup, Rozier tossed in a layup to make it a 14-point game. Cleveland waved the white flag and emptied its bench after that.

The Cavaliers led 55-48 at halftime. James briefly exited with 3:48 remaining in the second quarter after being hit in the face by an inadvertent shoulder from Tatum under the basket, but he returned with 1:57 to play in the half. James was diagnosed with a strained neck.

James and Brown combined for 35 of the game's first 50 points as the Cavaliers jumped out to a 27-23 lead after one quarter. Celtics coach Brad Stevens said of the team's approach to defending James, "I think the biggest thing is we're just trying to make it as hard as possible....

We've got a lot of different guys guarding him.

"Jaylen started the game on him, Morris is guarding him a ton. I thought Semi (Ojeleye) did a good job on the couple of possessions he guarded him, which is really hard to just come off the bench not in the flow of the game and put a body in front of him, but he's unbelievable."

Cleveland coach Tyronn Lue said, "We'll be better going back home. We know that. They played well in that second half, and we've got to be ready to go on Saturday."

Before the game, the Cavs landed this year's eighth overall pick as the NBA held its draft lottery. Cleveland acquired the selection, which originally belonged to the Brooklyn Nets, in the trade that sent Kyrie Irving to Boston last offseason.

NHL

Hedman shines as Tampa Bay Lightning strike Capitals

AFP
Washington

Victor Hedman finished with three points and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 36 shots as the Tampa Bay Lightning defeated the Washington Capitals 4-2 in game three of the Eastern Conference final series on Tuesday.

Hedman had a goal and an assist as the Lightning scored twice on the power play and cut the Capitals best-of-seven series lead to two games to one. He had an assist on power play goals by Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov and helped kill three penalties.

"I'm put in a position to produce, and I put that pressure on myself to do it," said Hedman. "For me, it's about being effective at all ends of the ice and trying to be a difference-maker every time I step on it."

Hedman has a goal and 10 assists during an eight-game point streak.

"We can't describe how good he is out there," said Stamkos of Sweden's Hedman. "We rely on him a tonne, he's a horse and most nights if he's going well, we're going well as a team."

"Another big effort for him tonight, and you could see we all followed suit."

Vasilevskiy bounced back from a subpar game two to deliver a strong performance as host Washington peppered him with 38 shots, including seven on the penalty kill in front of a crowd of 18,500 at the Capital One Arena.

Brett Connolly and Evgeny Kuznetsov scored goals for the Capitals, who are 7-1 in the playoffs on the road following a dominating 6-2 win in game two in Florida.

Connolly took advantage of a turnover by Tampa's Ondrej Palat halfway through the second period while Kuznetsov made things interesting, scoring his ninth goal of the playoffs with just over three minutes left in the third. Brayden Point also scored for the Lightning, who won the most games in the NHL during the regular season. Kucherov's goal snapped a seven-game scoreless drought for him.

Washington goaltender Braden Holtby surrendered four goals on 23 shots.

The Lightning victory means the series will now go back to Tampa for game five. But first, the teams will clash Thursday night with the Capitals hoping to regroup from this loss.

The Capitals played without Swedish forward Nicklas Backstrom, who missed his fourth straight game with a right hand injury.



Victor Hedman of the Tampa Bay Lightning celebrates after scoring a goal against the Washington Capitals during the third period in game three of the Eastern Conference Finals of the 2018 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs at Capital One Arena in Washington, DC. (Getty Images/AFP)

Avalanche re-sign Barberio to two-year deal

The Colorado Avalanche re-signed defenseman Mark Barberio to a two-year contract through the 2019-20 season, the team announced. The deal will pay Barberio \$1.45 million annually, according to a report from the Denver Post. The defender was set to become an unrestricted free agent this offseason.

Barberio, 28, matched a career high with 13 points (three goals, 10 assists) this season despite playing only 46 games. He missed nearly three months as the result of a lower-body injury suffered in January, returning for the final two games of the regular season before registering an assist in one of Colorado's six postseason games. "Mark has been a steady part of our blue line since joining the team and has helped solidify our defensive depth," Avalanche executive vice president and general manager Joe Sakic said in a team release. "He has played important minutes for us and has been a key penalty killer. We are pleased to have Mark under contract for the next two seasons."

For his career, Barberio has 13 goals and 40 assists in 239 NHL games across six seasons. The Avalanche added him on a waiver claim from the Montreal Canadiens in February of 2017.

MLB

Altuve's 3-run double lifts Astros over Angels

Reuters
Anaheim

Jose Altuve's three-run, eighth-inning double rallied the Houston Astros to a 5-3 win over the Los Angeles Angels on Tuesday night in Anaheim, California.

The reigning American League MVP hooked a slider from Angels reliever Jose Alvarez into the left field corner, driving in Josh Reddick, Yuli Gurriel and Alex Bregman to erase a 3-1 deficit and spoil a stellar performance by Angels starter Jaime Barria. Barria gave up one run and four hits (all singles) in seven innings, leaving with a 3-1 lead. He struck out seven and did not walk a batter.

However, the Astros took advantage of the Angels' bullpen. Houston loaded the bases in the eighth on a double by Reddick, a single by Gurriel and a walk by Bregman with one out, bringing up Altuve, who provided the game-winner with his second hit of the night. The Astros added an unearned run in the ninth.

Barria, 21, began the season at Triple-A Salt Lake and is currently in his third stint with the big league

club. The Astros scored their only run against him in the fourth on an RBI single by Brian McCann.

Barria and the Angels had their work cut out for them, going up against Astros starter Gerrit Cole, who entered the game leading the league in strikeouts (86) and ranking second in ERA (1.43) and opponents' average (.155).

Cole had pitched at least six innings in all eight of his starts before Tuesday, but he lasted just five innings against the Angels, making 98 pitches. Angels left fielder Justin Upton hit a two-run homer in the first inning, and backup catcher Rene Rivera hit a solo homer in the fifth.

Reddick had a big game defensively for the Astros, picking up two assists. He threw out Mike Trout trying to go first to third on a single by Shohei Ohtani in the fifth, and he threw out Ian Kinsler trying to score from second on a single by Kole Calhoun in the seventh. Ken Giles pitched the ninth for his sixth save.

Ben Zobrist singled in the go-ahead run to cap a two-run, ninth-inning rally and help the Chicago Cubs score a 3-2, come-from-behind win over host Atlanta on Tuesday, snapping the Braves' three-game

winning streak. The Cubs trailed 2-1 entering the ninth but came back to tie the game against Atlanta closer Aroldys Vizcaino.

Chicago's Albert Almora Jr. and Addison Russell put together back-to-back doubles to tie the game 2-2, then Zobrist lined an RBI single to center field with two outs to plate the go-ahead run. Brandon Morrow pitched a scoreless ninth to earn his 10th save in 11 tries. The win went to Carl Edwards Jr. (2-0), who surrendered a long solo home run to Atlanta rookie Ronald Acuna Jr. that gave the Braves a 2-1 lead in the eighth.

RESULTS

Cubs	3	Atlanta	2
A's	5	Red Sox	3
Astros	5	Angels	3
Giants	5	Reds	3
Padres	4	Rockies	0
Mariners	9	Rangers 8 (11 innings)	1
Twins	4	Cardinals	1
Pirates	7	White Sox	0
Marlins	4	Dodgers	2
Mets	12	Blue Jays	2
Diamondbacks	2	Brewers	1
Rays	6	Royals	5
Tigers	9	Indians	8
Yankees	3	Nationals	3

(suspended in sixth)



Houston Astros second baseman Jose Altuve hits a three-run double against the Los Angeles Angels during the eighth inning at the Angel Stadium of Anaheim. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

FOCUS

Test debut just the 'beginning' for upbeat Ireland

'We've always said Test Cricket wasn't the end of the journey, it's the beginning'

AFP
Dublin

Ireland's men's Test debut ended in a loss to Pakistan but the country's top Cricket administrator is confident the game can become a "major sport" on the domestic scene within a decade.

Ireland were eyeing a miracle at Malahide when, having been made to follow-on, they reduced Pakistan to 14 for three on Tuesday's fifth morning only for the tourists to eventually chase down a target of 160 for a five-wicket success.

"We've always said Test Cricket wasn't the end of the journey, it's the beginning," Cricket Ireland chief executive Warren Deutrom explained after the match.

"We've probably done this the wrong way around. Most teams, they get very good at what they do domestically then they make a big noise globally. We've made a big noise globally and are using that as a means of driving popularity and visibility of the sport back here in Ireland."

Gaelic games, rugby and football dominate the Irish sporting landscape but Deutrom is convinced Cricket, with its international reach, can make its mark.

"We're not going to suddenly be the biggest sport overnight but if I look back where we were 10 years ago to where we are now, and trace the potential for us over the next five, 10 years, there's no reason why we shouldn't be a major sport in Ireland," he insisted.

While England and Wales Cricket Board chairman Colin Graves has come under fire for suggesting none of the sport's current formats appeal to youngsters, Deutrom is looking to the limited overs game to help build a fanbase.

Cricket superpower India come to Ireland for two Twenty20 internationals in June and Deutrom said: "We need to keep playing (Test Cricket) because



Chief Executive of Cricket Ireland Warren Deutrom (right) with Rolling Stones singer Mick Jagger (centre) during Ireland's debut Test against Pakistan at Malahide Cricket Club in Dublin. (Reuters)

why otherwise would we have sought the status? But we don't want to do too much of it. It's going to be financially unsustainable.

"The Irish public has only ever really existed on a diet of ODIs (one-day internationals)," the Englishman added.

"We're really looking forward to the huge games against India coming up in June. I think we've nearly sold out the second game, which is 8,000 people, which is fantastic.

"The opportunities to grow the game will come primarily through the white-ball game but

we still want to keep in contact with the Test format. It's our way of maintaining our connection with the tradition of the sport."

'Do the right thing'

There are concerns over whether Ireland have the playing depth to build on an impressive run of results that have included World Cup wins over Pakistan, England and the West Indies.

Several members of the team that played in the Test match at Dublin's Malahide Cricket Club are in their 30s, with opener Ed Joyce, who has scored 47 first-

class hundreds, nudging 40.

But Deutrom is confident Cricket Ireland are establishing structures beneath the national side - including the three-team inter-provincial first-class competition - that will allow the likes of batsman James Shannon to step up when the 'golden generation' finally call it a day.

"We're now into the sixth season of our inter-provincial competition," said Deutrom.

"It was a risk because we could set it up and then we weren't going to get any funding to make it sustainable. Hanley Energy have come in to make it sustainable.

"We set up an academy at the same time as well, in 2013.

"Are we doing the right things? Yes, I believe we are.

"Now that we're on the FTP (Future Tours Programme) we're going to have the opportunity to have more reciprocal arrangements with the major countries to make sure we give the next tier of players opportunities, not just in our inter-provincial competition, through the academy but then also to have A team Cricket to make sure when we've got guys coming into the international team there as ready as they can be."

SPOTLIGHT

Ireland open to Pakistan tour if 'stars align'

AFP
Dublin

Ireland are open to touring Pakistan if "all the stars align," the chief executive of men's Test cricket's newest nation has said.

The Irish made their Test debut with a highly creditable five-wicket loss to Pakistan at Malahide Cricket Club, Dublin concluded Tuesday.

After being made to follow-on, Ireland reduced Pakistan to 14 for three to give themselves hope of a remarkable win before their visitors managed to chase down a modest victory target of 160.

The match further strengthened the cricket bonds between Ireland and Pakistan, which date back to when the non-Test nation knocked the subcontinental giants out of the 2007 World Cup with a stunning win in Jamaica.

Pakistan became a no-go area for leading cricket teams after an attack by armed militants on Sri Lanka's team bus in Lahore in 2009, with the United Arab Emirates becoming the team's unofficial home.

Zimbabwe became the first major international team to return to Pakistan in 2015, while April saw World Twenty20 champions West Indies visit for a three-match T20 series.

Ireland were due to tour Pakistan in 2014 only for the trip to be cancelled after militants attacked Karachi airport.

The Pakistan Cricket Board hope to be able to host a full series by 2020 and Cricket Ireland chief executive Warren Deutrom said on Tuesday that his organisation remained "very amenable" to touring Pakistan.

"We haven't received an official invitation," Deutrom told AFP at Malahide following the end of the Test match.

"The chairman of the Pakistan Board was here. I haven't had a complete debrief with our chairman yet to see whether or not those conversations took place but I wouldn't even say those conversations even started here.

Zimbabwe became the first major team to return to Pakistan in 2015, while April saw Windies visit for a 3-match T20 series

"For months, years, we've actually said to Pakistan, when you think it's right, safe to invite us, when you want to, economically or commercially, we are very amenable to an invitation," he added.

"When you send an invitation we presume it's because you perceive it to be safe enough for us to receive the invitation and then when you give us all the security arrangements around that we will look at that seriously, share them with our players, government, insurers and if all the stars align, we'd be happy to come."

Sri Lanka cricket reaps record profits despite shocker year

Sri Lanka's cricket board yesterday announced a profit of \$14 million last year, far above all previous records despite one of the worst on-field performances by the islanders in years. The board said it made a net profit of 2.12 billion rupees (\$14 million) in 2017 - a staggering 33 times what it made the year before. Revenues, at six billion rupees, were roughly double 2016 figures, Sri Lanka Cricket said in a statement.

"This was a result of SLC's strategic growth plans and prudent financial management," the board said in a statement.

The board did not elaborate on its dramatic turnaround. But sources attributed the sharp rise in profits to a packed 2017 calendar which featured home series against Bangladesh, India and Zimbabwe.

Earnings from the broadcasting of the Indian tour were thought to be a major contributor to the coffers, but Sri Lanka Cricket would not comment.

The record-breaking profits were the only good news from an otherwise woeful spell for Sri Lanka cricket, with the islanders enduring their worst year on the pitch since winning the World Cup in 1996.

They suffered a full series defeat against India and humiliatingly lost a home one-day series to bottom-ranked Zimbabwe. They also bowed out early from the Champions Trophy in June last year.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Bumrah stars as Mumbai beat Punjab by 3 runs

Agencies
Mumbai

Seamer Jasprit Bumrah snapped up three crucial wickets as defending champions Mumbai Indians kept their playoff hopes alive by notching up a thrilling three-run win over Kings XI Punjab in a crucial Indian Premier League (IPL) match at the Wankhede yesterday.

Chasing 187 to win, Rahul blasted 10 fours and three sixes in his 60-ball 94-run innings and shared a 111-run second wicket partnership with Aaron Finch (46) to take Punjab to the brink of a successful run-chase but Bumrah scalped three wickets in his second spell to derail the chase.

Mumbai Indians thus registered their sixth win to joined Kings XI and Rajasthan Royals at 12 points in the table. West Indian power-hitter Keiron Pollard finally found his groove with a fiery 50 to bail Mumbai out of trouble and post a challenging 186 for eight.

Pollard struck a 23-ball 50, containing five boundaries and three sixes and more importantly was engaged in a 65-run fifth wicket stand with Krunal Pandya (32 off 23 balls; 4x1, 6x2) to steady Mumbai's start that saw Punjab pacer Andrew Tye (4/16) striking thrice in the powerplay.

Put in to bat, Mumbai were off to a flying start with the in-form Suryakumar Yadav (27 from 15 balls; 4x3, 6x2) and Evin Lewis (9) putting on 37 runs in the first three overs before Australian Andrew Tye's triple strikes reduced the hosts to 59/3 in no time.

Continuing his glorious run with the bat, Suryakumar started off in his customary style before breaking loose as he smacked rookie pacer Ankit Rajpoot for two fours and as many sixes to milk 21 runs off the second over of the innings before Tye was

employed into the attack.

Tye struck on the very first ball of his spell with a well-disguised knuckle ball that broke through the defences of Lewis before removing Yadav and wicketkeeper-batsman Ishan Kishan (20 off 12; 4x1, 6x2) off consecutive deliveries in his second over.

During his brief stay, Ishan also meted out some special treatment to India discard Mohit Sharma, clobbering the right-arm pacer for a boundary and two massive sixes before being dismissed.

Mumbai's woes were compounded in the 9th over when a short-pitched delivery from Rajpoot cut short skipper Rohit Sharma's (6) stay in the middle. Tottering at 71/4 after eight overs, Mumbai's hopes were pinned on Pollard and Krunal Pandya.

Coming back, the right-left duo of Pollard and Krunal sent the visiting bowlers to the leather hunt as they resurrected the innings with a quick-fire 65-run stand.

While Krunal took Aussie Marcus Stoinis to the cleaners twice before striking a boundary off consecutive deliveries, Pollard deposited left-arm spinner Axar Patel for a massive six before belting Rajpoot for two fours and a six.

Stoinis, however, bounced back in his next over to pack back Krunal with a deceptive slower bouncer, ending in a simple top edge to the hands of Rajpoot at short fine before being hit for two boundaries and a six by Pollard as the West Indian completed his 22-ball fifty.

With Pollard going great guns blazing, Punjab skipper Ravichandran Ashwin brought himself back into the attack and the play worked immediately in the form of the big-hitting Caribbean batsman's wicket.

Ashwin struck once again with the wicket of Ben Cutting (4) before Tye came back to end Hardik Pandya's (9) short stay and complete his four-wicket haul.



Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma (left) celebrates the wicket of Kings XI Punjab player Marcus Stoinis with teammate Jasprit Bumrah during their Indian Premier League match at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)

TENNIS

Nadal and Djoko power on as Thiem crashes out in Rome

Sixth seed Pliskova smashes umpire's chair after losing to Greece's Sakkari



Spain's Rafael Nadal in action during his second round match against Bosnia and Herzegovina's Damir Dzumhur at the Italian Open in Rome yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Rome

Former winners Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic powered into the third round of the Italian Open in Rome yesterday but Austrian Dominic Thiem fell at the first hurdle.

Sixth seed Thiem crashed out just a week after inflicting a first clay-court defeat on Nadal in over a year in Madrid which cost the Spaniard the world number one ranking.

The 24-year-old destroyed his racket in fury as he suffered his first defeat to Italian Fabio Fognini in three meetings, sinking 6-4, 1-6, 6-3 at the Foro Italico.

Nadal later eased through 6-1, 6-0 against Bosnian Damir Dzumhur as he targets an eighth Rome title and first since 2013.

"After a loss in Madrid, it's important to come back strong. And that's what I did today," said Nadal, who received a first-round bye.

The 31-year-old, who claimed the 11th titles of his career at both Monte Carlo and Barcelona, took the first set in 34 minutes, coasting to victory in just an hour.

The 16-time Grand Slam winner next takes on either Canadian Denis Shapovalov, 19, or Robin Haase of the Netherlands.

"Today was a positive day. I don't know how many mistakes I did, but not much," said Nadal.

Djokovic, a four-time winner, is on the comeback trail three months after elbow surgery and eased past Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili 6-4, 6-2.

The Serbia will next play Spaniard Albert Ramos Vinolas who needed three sets to get past American eighth seed John Isner 6-7 (5), 7-6 (2), 7-6 (5).

Fognini, ranked 21, next plays Germany's Peter Gojowczyk before a possible quarter-final showdown with top seed Nadal.

"If you compare it to Madrid there were a lot of close matches I could have

lost there too. I did have chances," said Thiem.

Bulgarian third seed Grigor Dimitrov also suffered an early exit, going out to Japan's Kei Nishikori after a marathon 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-4 battle.

PLISKOVA RACKET RAGE

Former world number one Karolina Pliskova was so angry she put a hole in the umpire's chair with her racket instead of shaking hands after losing to Greece's Maria Sakkari.

Pliskova, the sixth seed, argued lengthily after an overhead shot was incorrectly ruled out and both the line judge and the umpire said they could not find the mark.

The controversial shot came in the third set with the Czech serving at 5-5 (30/30). She could not conceal her fury as she went on to lose the match 3-6, 6-3, 7-5.

Instead of shaking hands with the umpire after the match, Pliskova first put her hand out before beating up the chair.

Earlier, top women's seed Simona Ha-

lep needed just under an hour to advance 6-1, 6-0 past Naomi Osaka to avenge her defeat to the Japanese player in Indian Wells.

"It was one of those helpless feelings," conceded 20-year-old Osaka who could be heard saying "I want to cry" courtside. Halep needed to save four break points in her opening service game for 1-1 but then reeled off 12 in a row.

"I like to slide on the clay and today was easy for me. I'm more relaxed than in Madrid," said 26-year-old Halep.

Halep reached the final in Rome last year and needs to reach the quarter-finals this time to retain her world number one ranking.

She next plays 13th-seeded American Madison Keys, who battled past Croatian Donna Vekic 7-6 (2), 7-6 (0), for a place in the last eight.

France's Caroline Garcia, a semi-finalist in Madrid last week, eased past Hungary's Tímea Babos 6-3, 6-4, and will next face US Open champion Sloane Stephens.

CYCLING / GIRO D'ITALIA

Yates extends lead with stage 11 win, Froome slips further

AFP
Osimo, Italy

Simon Yates extended his lead in the Giro d'Italia yesterday with a solo finish giving him the 11th stage victory as fellow Briton Chris Froome lost more time.

The pink jersey wearer attacked on the final climb with a kilometre to ride to claim his second stage win this year, finishing two seconds ahead of defending champion Tom Dumoulin.

Italy's Davide Formolo was third a further three seconds behind after the 156km hilly route from the central city of Assisi across to Osimo near the Adriatic coast.

Race favourite Froome again lost steam in the final climb with the four-time Tour de France winner finishing in 42nd position, some 40 seconds behind Yates.

The stage crossed through the home town of Italian cyclist Michele Scarponi who was killed in a road accident a year ago.

Three breakaway riders Alessandro De Marchi, Leon Sanchez and Fausto Masnada were caught five kilometres from the line before two steep climbs to the finish.

Yates, who is competing in his

first Giro, has worn the leader's jersey since the arrival at the volcanic Mount Etna in Sicily last Thursday.

The 25-year-old Mitchelton-Scott rider extends his lead on Dutchman Dumoulin by a further six seconds to 47sec.

Today's 214km ride will be over a flat route from Osimo to Imola, two days before the grueling mountain stage with a summit finish on Monte Zoncolan.

STAGE 11 RESULTS (top 10)

1. Simon Yates (MIT) 3hr 25min 53sec
2. Tom Dumoulin (SUN) +2sec
3. Davide Formolo (BOR) +5
4. Alexandre Geniez (ALM) +8
5. Domenico Pozzovivo (BAH) +8
6. Patrick Konrad (BOR) +8
7. Thibaut Pinot (FDJ) +8
8. Maximilian Schachmann (QST) +11
9. Rohan Dennis (BMC) +18
10. Fabio Aru (EAU) +21

OVERALL STANDINGS (top 10)

1. Simon Yates (MIT) 47hr 08min 21sec
2. Tom Dumoulin (SUN) +47sec
3. Thibaut Pinot (FDJ) +1min 4sec
4. Domenico Pozzovivo (BAH) +1:18
5. Richard Carapaz (MOV) +1:56
6. George Bennett (LNL) +2:09
7. Rohan Dennis (BMC) +2:36
8. Peio Bilbao (AST) +2:54
9. Patrick Konrad (BOR) +2:55
10. Fabio Aru (EAU) +3:10



Romania appeal Rugby World Cup disqualification

AFP
Paris

Romania are to appeal a World Rugby ruling that saw them disqualified from next year's World Cup.

Russia were awarded a place at the 2019 World Cup in Japan after the rugby union international governing body sensationally disqualified Romania, Spain and Belgium on Tuesday.

Russia had finished third in European qualifying for the World Cup but head to the tournament after Romania, who originally won the section, second-placed Spain and fourth-placed Belgium were all docked points for fielding ineligible players.

In Romania's case, World Rugby said Stone Faka'osilea was ineligible having previously played for the Tonga sevens team.

The Romanian rugby federation insisted yesterday that Faka'osilea was indeed eligible, having had confirmation from Tonga rugby federation president Fe'ao Vunipola, father of England internationals Billy and Mako, to that note.

GOLF

Reed brings 'Captain America' intensity to Ryder Cup

AFP
Washington

With a flamboyant style and emotional boldness, Masters champion Patrick Reed promises to bring excitement to September's Ryder Cup and possibly the first US victory in Europe since 1993.

The 27-year-old Texan nicknamed 'Captain America' had the audacity to put finger to mouth and shush European fans during a match in Scotland as a rookie in 2014. He waved his arms to implore US cheers two years ago in an emotional Cup singles victory over Rory McIlroy in an American home Cup triumph.

"It's such an honour. When it comes down to Ryder Cup, you are playing for your country," Reed said. "You have your teammates. It's a whole different beast."

It's one that brings out the best in Reed, who led the US squad with 3.5 points in each of his prior Ryder Cup appearances.

While final rosters will not be settled until September, it's hard to imagine a Ryder Cup lacking Reed's fiery intensity.

Reed admits the Ryder Cup, and the 2024

Paris Olympics golf event set for the same Le Golf National course, lurk in his thoughts.

"Well, yeah, of course. It's always in the back of your mind," Reed said. "The easiest way to make those teams is just focus on what you're doing right now. If you prepare how you're supposed to every week and you play how you're supposed to every week, come 2020, 2024, you're going to be in there. You're going to make the team."

"The more you start thinking ahead is when you lose track of what you're doing now. All of a sudden you're not going to improve."

Reed formed a formidable combination with three-time major winner Jordan Spieth in the past two Ryder Cups and US Presidents Cup triumphs in 2015 and 2017. They figure to reunite in France as the Americans try to avoid a 25-year win drought in Europe.

Reed was the first PGA Tour golfer to win three times before playing his first major, a feat he achieved at Doral in 2014 after which he declared himself a top-five player in the world.

He's never been able to prove it in the world rankings, reaching as high as seventh in the rankings, but after winning his first major title last month at Augusta National, Reed is on a



roll that might make his boast real at long last, with four other top-10 finishes since mid-March.

Reed called his final round at last month's Masters "the hardest mentally a round of golf could possibly be" in contrast to the Ryder Cup,

which adds national pride and teammates to help carry the load.

"At The Ryder Cup, it's just a totally different type of pressure. You go to a Ryder Cup and you feel like you have a whole nation on your back," Reed said. "If you win or lose your match, you still have a bunch of other guys there that could pick it up."

LESSONS FROM TIGER

Work ethic and "be yourself" confidence are lessons that have been reinforced by Reed's idol, 14-time major winner Tiger Woods.

"You just have to feel like your head is strong when you're playing, that you can take on the world - that's the biggest thing I've probably tried to take from him," Reed said.

"I've put in the work," Reed said. "The biggest thing is now just to go out and play stress-free, just play fearless, go and attack the golf course."

Reed has far more milestones he hopes to achieve, including next month's US Open, the next major showdown.

"Really it's go out there and keep on getting myself in contention and trying to win some more majors," Reed said. "Winning takes care of everything."

FOOTBALL / AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Prolific striker El Arabi eyes more success for Duhail

'We are close to winning domestic treble and are in quarters of Champions League'



Al Duhail's Youssef El Arabi (right) celebrates his goal during the second leg of the AFC Champions League Round of 16 clash with Al Ain in Doha on Tuesday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Youssef El Arabi is sure Al Duhail can continue their march towards the latter stages of the AFC Champions League after the Qatari champions defeated Al Ain 4-1 in the second leg of the Round of 16 on Tuesday night to secure a place in the quarter-finals following an 8-3 aggregate win.

The victory was the Doha side's eighth in a row on the continent and 20th in all competitions as the QNB Stars League champions followed their 4-2 first leg win with an equally resounding performance as they continue to sweep all challengers aside.

Moroccan international El Arabi opened the scoring last week in Al Ain and the striker added another two to his

tally at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium to mean he is now the tournament's joint top scorer on nine goals.

"I am very happy that we qualified, have won all of our games and scored four goals home and away against Al Ain," said El Arabi. "I'm very happy that I scored twice today and this is the result of the efforts of the entire group. I want to thank my teammates because what's important is qualification."

Al Duhail had progressed as Group B winners having won all six of their games, but the 2016 runners-up and continental heavyweights Al Ain had been expected to offer greater resistance in the first knockout round.

Djamel Belmadi's side, though, raced to a 4-0 lead in the first leg as they overpowered the Emirati team, and it was only two goals in the final 25 minutes that gave Al Ain any hope going into the second leg.

But an early Mohamed Ahmad own-

goal on Tuesday killed the tie before El Arabi made it two on the half hour. Ismail Mohammad added a third and El Arabi bagged his brace from the spot, while Omar Abdulrahman grabbed a late consolation for the visitors.

In recent weeks, Al Duhail have wrapped up the QNB Stars League title and won the Qatar Cup. They play Al Rayyan in the Amir Cup final on Saturday and will now surely be ranked among the favourites for the AFC Champions League.

"Now we are close to winning the domestic treble and are in the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League," added El Arabi. "I am very happy with our performances and I think we have a good chance to go far in this tournament."

Meanwhile, coach Belmadi was delighted with his team qualification to the quarter-finals. "We are happy with the qualification, which was our main goal. And I am delighted that we could do it

by winning all our matches so far. We are having a very special season and we are not done so far. We want to continue playing at the same level," he said.

"It is important to have a full strength team and this was our problem in the past. We could not be successful in all the tournaments. But now with the quality squad we have we can win try titles in all the championship we take part," the Algerian said.

Al Ain manager Zoran Mamic was full of praise of Duhail team, calling the Qatari side one of the best teams in Asia. "You need to be a top team to be able to exploit the mistakes and Al Duhail did that. They deserved to reach the quarter-final. They played very good football, playing simple and not complicating things, with one-two touches and a lot of speed. They have such players in the team and they used that very well. This is the formula to be successful," Mamic said.

SPOTLIGHT

Countdown begins as AZF gets ready for Ramadan Sports Festival



Action from last year's football competition in Aspire Zone Foundation's Ramadan Sports Festival.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) is ready to welcome over 1,000 sports enthusiasts to the Ramadan Sports Festival (RSF) 2018 competitions, which kick off on Monday.

Over the past week, the organising committee has held several technical meetings with the teams and players taking part in the tournaments to brief them on rules and regulations. A draw has been held for each tournament.

AZF's outdoor warm-up track and Aspire Dome's indoor hall will host the men's football and volleyball competitions.

The eight-day football tournament will start at 9:30pm on Monday and will run until May 28. The tournament will see four groups of twelve teams compete in a group stage before moving to the finals.

At the same time, the volleyball competition will also begin on Monday and run till May 25. The five-day competition features 12 teams competing in four groups.

In the third edition of the cricket tournament, members of the local community in Qatar will have the opportunity to watch ten teams competing over four days, starting May 30.

Meanwhile, Aspire Dome's multi-purpose hall will host the men's indoor hockey tournament. Featuring eight teams, this will be held over two days May 24-25.

Men's five-day basketball tournament will be held in the Dome's indoor hall from May 27 to June 1 with 12 teams of nine players taking part.

Ladies will also have ample opportunity to get involved and stay active during the Holy Month of Ramadan. RSF's famous volleyball tournament,

scheduled to run from May 26-31, features seven teams this year and helps to fulfil AZF's core objective of promoting healthy and active lifestyles among every community in Qatar.

On June 1, boys aged 9 to 14 will have the chance to put their fitness to test in the male fitness challenge in two age groups (9-11 and 12-14) at the Aspire Ladies Hall from 9:30pm until midnight.

In collaboration with the Qatar Paralympic Committee, AZF will organise the sixth consecutive Table Tennis competition for people with special needs on May 23. Last year, over 36 participants competed in three categories - visual impairment, physical impairment (sitting/standing) and hearing impairment - at the one-day event.

Aspetar, the orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital and AZF member, has launched a new 'Healthy Ramadan' campaign to increase awareness of the importance of an active and healthy lifestyle during the Holy Month.

To further promote physical activity among community members, Aspetar will share short health and awareness videos via its official social media channels, and will then engage and interact with the audience through Facebook and Instagram Story feature.

Meanwhile, Aspetar will also organise a sports competition for AZF employees as part of its 'Step into Health' programme during Ramadan. This competition will celebrate participants who walk the most each week and uses a smartphone app to calculate the number of steps.

Interested sports enthusiasts can register by visiting www.aspirezone.qa/rsf2018. The RSF 2018 is sponsored by Ooredoo Qatar and Saleh Al Hamad Al Mana Company, Nissan Qatar.

CELEBRATION

Aspire Academy's football department concludes season

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Aspire Academy's Football Department celebrated the conclusion of the 2017-18 football season earlier this week with two closing ceremonies. The first ceremony was organised for the Academy's student-athletes aged between 13-18 and the second for the Aspire Academy-run Feeder Group programme for boys aged 12 and below.

The department, led by Technical Director Edorta Murua, organises these ceremonies at the end of each year to recognise the achievements and hard work of its student-athletes and their coaching staff.

At the ceremonies, each age-group performed on stage under the theme 'What Aspire means to me'. Some called it their "second home", some "road to success", "their reason for cultivating a fighting spirit", their "family" and their "dream". And there were those who said "Aspire is Qatar, and Qatar is Aspire".

Two young footballers from each age-group were also named this year's Best Continuity Player and Best Supporting Player based on their overall performance during the season.

"This ceremony was a great way to look back at the season and the team's achievements, so they can reflect on their development, particularly in light of the new programmes we incorporated in the learning process this year," Murua said.

He added: "Understanding the game is crucial for their development as football players, so we encouraged them to reflect on their performance and be proactively involved in the decision-making process to find solutions on the pitch. Overall, we are happy with the progress our players made this season."

Meanwhile, Saeed Ali al-Marri, Football Administration Manager, said, "This celebration is a culmination of the efforts and achievements of our boys this past year, who have recorded some great results in friendly competitions, such as the year-round Tri-Series football tournament, and international training camps."

"Everything, all the memories, games and moments, is recorded. Nothing is forgotten. We're proud of all our boys, and we hope that one day they'll have the opportunity to represent Qatar well on the global stage," he concluded.

On Monday evening, the Feeder Group, a programme that precedes en-

rollment at the Academy and is responsible for training students below the age of 12 who demonstrate exceptional football skills during the scouting process, also celebrated the end of their season by organising an engaging event for the programme's young footballers and their families.

Speaking on the sidelines of the ceremony, Arno Buitengeweg, head of Feeder Teams Football Programme, said, "This year we brought some changes to the programme in the methodology as we continue to work towards laying the foundation that will help the boys develop into tomorrow's top players."

"Our target is to help reduce the gap between where the feeders (U12 boys) are now (in terms of athletic development) and where they need to be when they join the Academy on full-time basis. We ran 60 training sessions for the young boys in our programme, and their commitment during these precipitated a great improvement in their skills."

"Their sportsmanship on and off the field has impressed even the programme's coaching department. One of the things we are also happy about is the increasing involvement from the boys' parents in our programme. We feel good about our progress this season."

